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ABSTRACT

As educators and office holders respond to the demands for increased accountability in America's schools by turning to the creation of systems with which to develop, implement, and measure success, they turn away from the importance of relationships. Public schools' student populations are becoming more diverse while their staffs are becoming more homogeneous, pressing the need to concentrate on relationships. Researchers point to the necessity of relationship in improving America's schools, yet practitioners responding to public pressure have yet to see the value of this advice. Sixty-two suggested "I will" messages comprise a strategy with which to reverse this impersonal development in public schools, to demonstrate the kind of behavior, on the part of all the people who share those schools, and that will come to be known as, "I care." (KB)

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USING "I WILL" MESSAGES TO PROMOTE RELATIONSHIPS IN SCHOOLS

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Across America, a wave of accountability is being embedded in our public schools. State after state is demanding both educators and students be held to higher standards as a means of proving that America's system of education works.

State assessment programs, teacher evaluation systems, and professional development activity are all being quickly re-tooled in order to respond to this edict for verification that schools are doing what they are supposed to do, make students smarter.

Tom Peters, the master spinner of management thinking once said, "Markets don't buy anything; people do." Is it not also true that systems to not make schools run; people do?

Generally, people respond to change in one of three ways. They behave in a functional manner, supporting the initiative; they behave in a dysfunctional way in response to the proposal, attempting to block its implementation; or they behave in a non-functional way, waiting to see if the idea has merit or it they can be won over as a result of a distinct leadership style. Paul Hershey and Ken Blanchard, two management researchers, add that leaders respond to followers through either task behavior, telling them more about what to do and how to do it, or through relationship behavior, demonstrating encouragement and support while the followers are attempting to complete the next assignment. Why would students behave in any other way? They don't.

Lost in the new education accountability debates is what Herbert Kohl, in I Won't

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Learn From You!, describes as the need to develop relationships in schools. He discerns between students who can't learn and students who make a conscious decision to not learn. Why, one would ask, would a student sit in a classroom, having the background and experiences to complete the task, and simply refuse to do so? The answer Kohl responds, is in the relationships. "To agree to learn from someone who does not respect your integrity cause a major loss of self. The only alternative you have is to not learn and reject the stranger's world."

". . . and reject that stranger's world." What a powerful statement that many know is true. Whether it was time served in the military and taking orders from an officer for whom there was no respect, finding oneself in an employment situation serving a supervisor who demonstrates less prowess than do the employees, or having volunteered for a task in a service organization, only to discover that the leader is one who cannot command respect, most people know the feeling. Why should it be any different for students?

Magnifying this challenge is the reality that, as the nation's public school student population grows more diverse, the background of the people who work in those same schools becomes more homogenous. As Roland Barth reported, in Improving Schools From Within, it all starts . . . it all ends . . . with relationships.

So critical is the matter of relationships that Charlotte Danielson, in Enhancing Professional Practice, A Framework for Teaching, a book on which some state teacher

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evaluation systems will be based, in discussing Domain 2: The Classroom Environment, uses two components in an attempt to tease out teacher behaviors which may improve relationships. Danielson created the components within the domains in an attempt to make the observation of teacher behavior less or an art and more of a science. In so doing, she discovered what really makes schools better, relationships.

Albert Einstein said it best, "Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts." So it is with education and accountability. Educators and office holders are running the risk of paying so much attention to the systems that they are forgetting the importance of the people who run those systems and work within them, whether they are big and older or small and younger.

It is not easy to measure the value of a relationship. Motivational speaker Mark Scharenbroich pointed out, "One can never fully measure the impact of an educated student."

How does one develop a relationship? One could ask, "If tomorrow the local police came into my classroom, clicked the cuffs on my wrists, and accused me of caring, could they get enough evidence to get a conviction? What would people around me say that I did and said that would prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I care?" The following "I Will" messages provide an indication of the type of behavior one could demonstrate in order that the students and parents may come to see that individual as a caring person.

Relationships are about time and caring . . . and it is a buyers' market. It takes a persistent and consistent type of behavior to prove to students that one cares. Students

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have been given many reasons to doubt adults. Values are demonstrated more by what one does and less by what one says. If caring is present, students will see it more and hear it less.

It is more about how students feel about the teacher than it is any particular delivery style that makes the difference in a classroom. Developing relationships will make a difference in America's schools.

It is not so much about getting back to the basics as it is getting back to the relationships. After all, public schools, more than anything else, are about people.

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LIST OF "I WILL" MESSAGES TO IMPROVE RELATIOSHIPS

I WILL greet my students in a positive way each morning.

I WILL regard each day as a new beginning for each student.

I WILL have frequent one-on-one conferences with students emphasizing the positive.

I WILL state my need in a normal tone of voice as opposed to raising my voice and giving demands.

I WILL ask questions rather than make assumptions.

I WILL think before I speak.

I WILL ask students how they think a situation might be addressed.

In the classroom, I WILL use humor to reach students.

I WILL call parents as soon as behavior occurs.

I WILL call parents of students with positive behavior and as behavior changes.

I WILL model respect and be available to students.

I WILL discuss inappropriate behaviors privately.

I WILL mentor at least one student with challenging behavior.

I WILL maintain parent communication.

I WILL call families and ask for input before problems arise.

I WILL follow the pre-referral process.

I WILL greet each student in a personal and positive manner.

I WILL model appropriate behavior. (i.e. please, thank you, etc.)

I WILL actively seek to know our students as individuals.

I WILL greet each student as that student enters my classroom.

I WILL use a positive praise and reward system.

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I WILL ignore negative behavior (as appropriate) while praising the positive behaviors.

I WILL teach the appropriate social skills.

I WILL have frequent positive communication with parents.

I WILL request necessary data to form positive relationships with parents.

I WILL establish a rapport with students.

I WILL make use of the agenda book to better communicate with parents.

I WILL make more parent contacts by telephone.

I WILL be more involved in my students' lives outside of the classroom.

I WILL be sincere to my students' personal needs and concerns.

I WILL use class incentives to improve student behavior.

I WILL use mutual respect to improve minority academic achievement.

I WILL show interest in the achievement of all my students.

I WILL understand my students' cultural background.

I WILL have more one-on-one conversations with all of my students.

I WILL develop more interventions before I assign formal punitive measures.

I WILL make my teaching methods reflect that learning is fun! and interesting!

I WILL work with the other teachers on my team to create a positive atmosphere.

I WILL communicate with parents about expectations, behavior, and general information about their children.

I WILL take students aside to address their inappropriate behavior.

I WILL praise my students for their willingness to attempt new tasks.

I WILL create an atmosphere in which failure is an accepted part of the learning process. We learn from mistakes.

I WILL share my own experiences in learning and growing.

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I WILL sit with my students while they work in class.

I WILL be available to talk and help my students when needed.

I WILL give positive responses to questions as they are expressed in my class.

I WILL say what I mean, and mean wheat I say.

I WILL make a positive contact with every parent each marking period. This may be through the telephone, a note in the agenda book, a general information letter, or by having students write letters to their parents.

I WILL get help from additional resources such as guidance, the nurse, HOSTS, the Reading Program, a social worker, the special education department, etc.

I WILL greet my students each day with a smile.

I WILL be courteous and respectful to all students.

I WILL relate my confidence to students in their ability to succeed.

I WILL correct behavior in a discreet and courteous manner.

I WILL have high expectations for students. I WILL clearly relate those expectations to students.

I WILL let students know I like them through my verbal and physical behavior.

I WILL not speak negatively about students or groups – not compare – in front of others.

I WILL praise students who deserve it. I WILL encourage everyone! However, I WILL stress encouragement over praise.

I WILL give compliments to students when appropriate.

I WILL admit I am wrong or be willing to say I'm sorry when needed.

I WILL agree to disagree with you. (staff/student/parent)

I WILL be a good role model.

I WILL <u>listen</u> to student concerns. (Seek first to understand.)

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ABSTRACT

As educators and office holders respond to the demands for increased accountability in America's schools by turning to the creation of systems with which to develop, implement, and measure success, they turn away from the importance of relationships.

Public schools' student populations are becoming more diverse while their staffs are becoming more homogenous, pressing the need to concentrate on relationships.

Researchers point to the necessity of relationships in improving America's schools yet practitioners responding to public pressure have yet to see the value of this advance.

The use of "I Will" messages is a strategy with which to reverse this impersonal development in public schools, to demonstrate the kind of behavior, on the part of all of the people who share those schools, that will come to be known as, "I care."

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